The US Occupation of Iraq

Prakash Karat

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Contents

1.	Iraq: War to Reorder the World	1
2.	The American Occupation	17
3.	Parallels in the Past	23
4.	The Heroic Legacy of the Iraqi Communist Party	32
5.	Troops for Iraq: No Yielding to American Pressure	41
6.	No Indian Troops for Recolonisation	46

Note

The articles published in this booklet were written by Prakash Karat, Member of the Polit Bureau of the.CPI(M), after the US-British invasion took place leading to the occupation of Iraq. Written in the period from mid-April to end June, 2003, they deal with the implications of an Iraq under US occupation for the region and the world; the prospects of resistance to the recolonisation given the anti-colonial traditions of the Iraqi people; and the history of the Iraqi Communist Party in this struggle. The attitude of the BJP rulers in India to this latest American imperialist adventure and the attempt to ingratiate themselves with the U.S. by sending Indian troops to Iraq also finds a prominent place.

Written in the period, from mid-April to end June, 2003, these pieces were published in the *People's Democracy, The Marxist, Frontline* and *The Hindu*. No major changes have been made in the articles as they appeared, except to delete and edit certain portions which were repetitions.

In the struggle against the new aggressive phase of US imperialism, the world-wide opposition to the war on Iraq was a significant development. In this connection, it is essential to fight the pro-American orientation of the BJP-led government. This booklet emphasises this important anti-imperialist task.

Iraq: War to Reorder the World

The war on Iraq is not to pre-empt a threat to the United States nor to eliminate weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a dictator. In the name of "regime change" it is nothing but an audacious step in the thrust for total American domination of the world. The 21st century is seeing the proclamation of an US imperium. The goal being to maintain and consolidate global hegemony, secure the interests of US multinational capital and the use of military power to prevent any challenge to its imperial interests.

Imperialism, at the beginning of the 21st century is marked by the dominance and exercise of American power. With the advent of the Bush presidency, this has become overt and brazen, but the processes were set in motion in the last decade of the 20th century. Iraq stands as an emblem for this new aggressive imperialism.

The war on Iraq marks a turning point. The US will be occupying an independent Arab state and converting it into a protectorate, a la Afghanistan. The US, after the Second World War, stationed troops and maintained bases in the Arab world – in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and the Gulf states. It has intervened a number of times in West Asia to topple regimes or prop up client ones. For this, it has a reliable ally and base in Israel. Yet this will be first time, the United States will be an occupying power in an Arab country, despite the puppet regime that it will eventually set up. There can be no more dramatic manifestation of the new American imperial order than the setting up of its new outpost in Iraq in the oil-rich region.

The war on Iraq was foreordained. It was bound to happen,

even had the attacks on September 11, 2001 not taken place. September 11 provided a convenient pretext. It is the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive war in action. The war on Afghanistan was only the prelude. The "axis of evil" speech, targeting Iraq, Iran and North Korea was made soon after. The "global war against terrorism" and the concept of an unending war was propounded. The ease with which a global coalition against terrorism was rallied, emboldened the "new imperialists" in the Bush administration.

Why Iraq?

Iraq has been the subject of an unending war since 1991. The 12-year sanctions regime was continuation of war by other means. It was maintained by the United Nations mainly due to the insistence of the US. Iraq has been the target of not only the present Bush administration, but of the Clinton presidency which succeeded the Bush Sr. administration. Both the 1993 air strikes and the 1998 "Desert Fox" operation when Iraq was subjected to seventy-two hours of bombardment were conducted in the Clinton years. These attacks were apart from the constant aerial bombardment in the no-fly zones carved out of Iraqi airspace. The reality is that Iraq has been a prime target of American imperialism without any let-up.

What motivates this unremitting hostility? Iraq is the only major country (apart from Iran and Syria) which is outside the grip of the US in the region. The Saddam Hussein regime's intransigence must be seen in the context of the strategic importance of Iraq. With the world's second largest oil reserves and a modern state based on the Baathist party's authoritarian system, Iraq posed a threat to the hegemonic position of the US in the region and more immediately to the Israeli state's role as the latter's chief agent. The occupation of Kuwait in 1990 by Iraq confirmed the American fears that Iraq under Saddam Hussein would prove intractable and more dangerous than Iran. During the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, the US had supplied arms to both countries in a cynical move to divide and weaken both powers at one stroke.

The manner in which the Bush administration ratcheted up its case for war and embarked on its military aggression, itself reveals the new calculus of unbridled imperialism bent upon world domination.

The rightwing think tank the "Project for the New American Century" had prepared a document "Rebuilding America's Defences: Strategy Forces and Resources for a New Century", in September 2000[1]. It had stated: "While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification, the need for a substantial American presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein". The PNAC had people associated with the earlier Reagan and Bush Sr. administrations.

Earlier, in a 1998 letter to President Clinton, they said: "We should establish and maintain a strong US military presence in the region, and be prepared to use that force to protect our vital interests in the Gulf – and, if necessary, to help remove Saddam from power." The letter was signed by Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Richard Armitage and others who are key figures in the Bush administration.

It is these men who prepared the National Security Strategy of the United States of America presented by Bush to the US Congress in September 2002. The document sets out clearly the strategic goals of US imperialism today. Firstly, it strives for maintaining total world domination. Secondly it proclaims the willingness to strike pre-emptively at perceived or potential threats to the interests of the US. Thirdly, it states explicitly that the US will act to prevent any other power from equaling or challenging US power. The document concludes with the warning: "Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build up in the hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States."

For Marxists, the use of military power for aggression, conquest or destabilizing regimes, are manifestations of processes within the world capitalist system in the era of imperialism.

Conflicts between nation-states and between imperialist states themselves are a result of competition and exploitation engendered by the imperialist system. Both geopolitical and economic interests are interwoven in military conflicts.

How does one see the unprecedented superiority of US military power and the way it uses it? There is no doubt that the military power of the US gives it a pre-eminent position in the imperialist system. The US alone spends 40 per cent of the world's total expenditure on defence. The US spends more on its defence budget than the next 25 major countries put together. But this military strength is not mirrored in comparable economic power and dominance. Here the competition with Western Europe and Japan is less unequal. While Germany and Japan, after the Second World War, had always accepted US leadership on the political/global plane, on the economic front, there has always been competition and conflicts. In the last decade of the twentieth century, the US conscious of this rivalry has sought to exploit every opportunity to build and consolidate its economic strength.

A Marxist analysis of this unbridled use of military power by the imperialist superpower would necessarily look at its economic underpinnings. The US ruling circles are anxious to maintain its hegemony over the international economic order. A system which benefits America the most, among all the advanced capitalist countries. Free capital mobility, free trade (except where it affects one's domestic interests) and having the dollar as the main reserve currency. Such a system enables the US to finance an unlimited trade deficit and to keep the flow of capital from abroad coming. Coincidentally, the Iraq invasion has occurred at a time when the US economy is stalling after the weak recovery from the 2001 downturn. Though the Federal Reserve has lowered short-term interest rates 12 times in three years and there is a $300 billion deficit this year, as compared to a $237 billion surplus in 2000, the combination of increased government spending and low interest rates is not working.

The decline in the US economic growth in the recent pe-

riod is pushing the US military circles to increase military expenditure and stimulate the economy with war expenditure. While the burden of military expenditure is increasing the deficit, "Nevertheless, military expenditure is unquestionably providing the Administration's most direct stimulus to the economy, as registered in the fact that, in the year following 9/11, the equities of the nation's largest defence contracts performed 30 percent better than those of S&P 500."[2]

It is in this background that we must see Iraq and its imminent occupation. There are both geo-political and economic motives behind the drive to establish unchallenged suzerainty over the Gulf region. Oil is no doubt a key issue. By 2020 the US will be importing 60 per cent of its daily oil requirements. Control over the oil resources of Iraq will immeasurably strengthen its pre-eminent position in the imperialist bloc – to the disadvantage of the European powers and Japan and eventually help the US confront the real potential threat, China.

But it is not oil alone, which drives the current war on Iraq. The global hegemonic strategy of the US requires it to put down all recalcitrant states, especially those with the potential to be regional powers who can defy the US will. After the cold war, the US strategists have in their quest for total domination posited the threat from "rogue states", listed countries as sponsors of terrorism and finally under Bush the "axis of evil". The US has been consistent in its hostility to Arab nationalist movements and Arab states who assert their independence. These stem from a two-fold reason, firstly it requires client states for the control of oil and secondly for protecting its gendarme, the Israeli state.

Significance of Sept. 11

The September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington were a watershed. It provided the pretext and became the catalyst for the brazen attempt to reorder the world[3]. As the CPI(M) 17th Congress Political Resolution pointed out: "The terrorist

attacks in the USA on September 11, 2001 and the consequent war launched by US imperialism with some of its allies on Afghanistan, have far reaching implications on international developments. US imperialism is seeking to utilise the situation to further strengthen its hegemony – economic, political and military – worldwide."

Iraq came on the horizon immediately. The day after September 11, at a National Security Council meeting, Rumsfeld, the Secretary for Defense, raised the issue of going after Iraq not just the Al Qaeda. Next day at Camp David, both Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz raised the matter again[4].

The Spoils of War

There are immediate and substantial profits to be made from the occupation of Iraq. The UN has authorized the revival of the oil-for–food programme under the 'defacto authority' in Iraq. $10 billion accruing from oil sales will be made available for essential supplies and humanitarian relief. The US will, as the occupying authority, have at its disposal, the funds generated from the sale of Iraqi oil. So America, after inflicting the devastation on the lives of the Iraqi people, will be providing relief to them at their own expense. Not only that, the "reconstruction of Iraq" will be a lucrative affair.

Apart from the oil revenues being used by US companies to "rebuild Iraq" the whole reconstruction programme will be directed by the US occupying authority. The USAID has already put out tenders for the building of roads, power and infrastructure. In the $75 billion requested by the President from the Congress for the war, $ 3.5 billion is set aside for reconstruction in Iraq. American companies will get most of the lucrative contracts. The way a subsidiary of Halliburton (formerly headed by Vice-president Dick Cheney) was awarded the $4.8 million contract to rebuild the Umm Qasr port is an indication of the rich pickings for the favoured corporations of the Bush circle.

As for the real prize—the oil assets, the Saddam Hussein government had handed out a number of contracts to Russian and French companies; companies such as the French oil company Total Fina Elf and the Russian consortium led by Lukoil. They will find themselves out of the reckoning in an American protectorate. The US companies Exxon Mobil, Chevron-Texaco and so on will have a field day.

In the old days when British colonialism ruled the roost, there was the Iraq Petroleum Company which was owned by the Anglo-American & Dutch companies. What is happening is a reversion to the old style colonialism which existed between the two world wars.

Iraq & The American Empire

The global war against terrorism proclaimed after September 11 led to the US entering Central Asia in a big way and establishing its military bases in Kyrgyztan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Caspian basin oil-rich region has been opened up to American oil companies. After the Gulf, the Caspian basin has the biggest oil reserves. The US has gone back into the Philippines and is steadily increasing its military presence in South Asia with Afghanistan and Pakistan having permanent military bases and military collaboration agreements with India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The conversion of Iraq into an American protectorate will mean a significant expansion of the military-imperial network in the Middle East. Turkey, the only country in this region to be part of NATO, is a longstanding ally, despite the recent rupture over allowing American troops access to Northern Iraq through Turkey. Between Afghanistan and Turkey only Iran and Syria remain who are not allied to the US. Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf states are all within its orbit with their governments cooperating with the US.

The condemnatory remarks of Donald Rumsfeld and

Secretary of State, Colin Powell during the invasion of Iraq regarding the help Syria is giving the Iraqi government and of Iran's promotion of terrorism, portend America's next round of attrition against these two states.

The concept of imperialism was something unmentionable and unacceptable to the ruling class ideologues of the West after the Second World War. It was only the Marxists who persisted in analyzing the world in terms of imperialism and its dynamics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, even sections of the Left abandoned the use of the term. The term has come back into usage after September 11. Ironically, it is the rightwing ideologues who have embraced the term and unashamedly advocate the virtues of an American empire. Michael Ignatieff who teaches at Harvard University has written about such an American empire. According to him the new US empire "is not like the empires of times past, built on colonies, conquest and the white man's burden. We are no longer in the era of the United Fruit Company, when American corporations needed the marines to secure the investments overseas. The 21st century imperium is a new hegemony whose grace notes are free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known."[5]

As for the conquest of Iraq, he claims that "Iraq is an imperial operation that would commit a reluctant republic to become the guarantor of peace, stability, democratization and oil supplies in a combustible region of Islamic peoples."

One of the editors of *Wall Street Journal*, Max Boot, called for the military occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq citing the role played by the British during the 19th century in the region. He wrote: "The September 11 attack was the result of insufficient American involvement and ambition; the solution is to be more expansive in our goals and more assertive in their implementation." Another journalist, Robert Kaplan wrote a book, *Warrior Politics* which demanded that the US leadership "bring prosperity to distant parts of the world under America's soft imperial influ-

ence". Kaplan stated "There is a positive side to empire. It is in some ways the most benign sign of order".

American rightwing propagandists, supporting the Bush administration do not shy away from terming the role of the United States as an imperialist one. Their British counterparts are not far behind. One of Blair's senior policy advisers Robert Cooper called for a new liberal imperialism. In an article published in the leading British paper *The Observer*, Cooper stated "What is needed then is a new kind of imperialism, one acceptable to a world of human rights and cosmopolitan values. We can already discern this outline: an imperialism which, like all imperialism, aims to bring order and organization but which rests today on the voluntary principle." He then goes on to spell out what he calls the "voluntary imperialism of the global economy". He lauds the role of international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. This coming out of the closet by the neo-imperialists indicates the arrogance and confidence with which they see America as the sole hegemon and superpower in the world. The war against Iraq with the sole purpose of the removal of President Saddam Hussein and occupying the country, indicates what is in store for all the nation states who do not adjust themselves to the new imperial order.

India's Imperialist Supporters

America's grab for Iraq has brought out in sharp relief the pro-imperialist trends which are inherent in the BJP-RSS outlook. From the outset, the Vajpayee government refused to oppose the war moves of the United States and to mobilise other countries to take a common stand. After a period of silence, faced with increasing criticism, all that the BJP-led government was prepared to state was that any action to be taken against Iraq must have the endorsement of the United Nations. This was followed by the refusal of the government for a resolution by parliament opposing the war. The plea given was that the government's hand should not be tied before the non-aligned meeting at Kuala Lumpur where

flexibility was required to arrive at a common position. At the NAM summit, India was among those countries which played a role in diluting the strong draft prepared by Malaysia on the threat of war against Iraq. Finally, the talk of a "middle path" was a signal to the United States: India would while stating that it did not want a war, be happy to go along with the United States once the aims of the war are accomplished. It is this double-faced stand which satisfied the United States and led its Ambassador Robert Blackwill to assert that there was no difference between India's stand and that of the US on how to deal with Iraq.

The RSS also adopted an ambiguous position. For the record, the RSS chief Sudarshan in a statement opposed the moves for war against Iraq. When the war actually began, there has been no condemnation of the war or America's aggression. *The Organiser* in its editorial stated "The US state department is free to set the agenda for the Americans, not for the world. And certainly not for the unipolar world passing on to a multi-polar one. At the same time, the argument as to why the US must seek the permission of Bonn, or Beijing to use its military might against what it perceives as threat to its security and well being seems to hold water". The RSS is obviously the source of the obfuscatory stand taken by the BJP on the war.

For the BJP-RSS combine, the model to be followed is the aggressive expansionist Israeli state. Subjugating Iraq and teaching the Arabs a lesson is something desired by the Israeli ruling circles. The rabid Hindu communalists would also be happy at such an outcome. The only complaint the RSS has is that the United States does not deal with Pakistan in the same way as it does Iraq.

The pronounced rightwing trend is also evident in sections of the intelligentsia and the media. All through the build-up for the war, a number of rightwing editors, strategic affairs experts and former diplomats have argued for India openly supporting the American war. In two successive articles, Shekhar Gupta, the Editor-in-Chief of *The Indian Express* set out reasons for supporting America's war. According to him, the US takeover of Iraq will be

the prelude to democracy in the Middle East and the elimination of Islamic fundamentalism. "The war will lead to a prolonged American occupation of Iraq and they will first shift the centre of gravity to the Islamic world from Riyadh to Baghdad and then do what it takes to defang, if not de-Islamise, the politics of the Muslim (particularly the Arab) world.....Not all analysts agree with what Bush is doing, but they all say his team has concluded that band-aid solutions won't work in the Muslim world, that it needs reconstructive surgery and some minor amputations, like Saddam. Does that work to our benefit or detriment? Given a chance – and the power – wouldn't we have liked to do just that? This war will not be about oil, but about militant Islam and everybody's future." It is not naivety which leads Gupta to put out such arguments. Borrowing ideas from the US rightwing think-tanks and newspapers like the *Wall Street Journal* has become a habit for much of the big business run media in India. The United States has been the biggest patron and protector of the Saudi Arabian regime which has been the chief centre to spread fundamentalism around the world. A little reading of history would show how America brought in Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia into this strategic chain in the Middle East to control the Gulf region in the fifties. The Baghdad Pact, mentioned earlier, was one of the first such moves.

By smashing the Baathist regime in Iraq, America has struck against one of the few major secular states in the Arab world. This will not "defang" or "de-Islamise" the politics of the region but provide a fillip to fundamentalism and religious extremism. Nor can anyone subscribe to the make-believe world of democracy flourishing under a Pax Americana in the Arabian deserts. Leave alone the medieval system of the Saudi royal family, the US-backed "democracies" of Egypt, Jordan and Morocco are different versions of authoritarianism which exist all over the region. The alacrity with which the Indian Express editor advocates the cause of an American empire mirrors his eagerness to get the Indian print media tied up with the media barons of the West.

Despite the pro-American stance of the BJP, among the

people there are strong sentiments against the war and sympathy for Iraq. It is this public opinion which compelled the BJP to eventually "deplore" the war and term it unjustified. However, the anti-war mobilisation has been limited in the country. Except in West Bengal and Kerala where the Left mobilised hundreds of thousands of people in protest actions, the only other major protests have been conducted by the Left parties, Muslim organisations and some non-Left parties with a Muslim base. The Congress party while recording its formal opposition to the war did nothing much to mobilise the people and campaign against the war.

It is important for the Left and democratic forces to realize the impact of the BJP/RSS combine's campaign against "Islamic terrorism". The US "war against terrorism" is portrayed by the BJP as helpful to its war against Pakistan sponsored terrorism. This has contributed to the blunting of the anti-imperialist feelings among some sections of the people. Both the BJP's pro-imperialist stance and the Congress refusal to mobilise its mass base prevented a much larger mass mobilisation for anti-war protests even though the general sentiment is against the war.

Resistance of People's & Countries

The occupation of Iraq was an inevitable outcome of the US war of aggression. But this latest exhibition of unbridled power has not been without resistance. The opposition to the war on Iraq has been unprecedented in many ways. Firstly, the United States faced opposition from some of its major allies in Europe like France and Germany. In the Security Council three permanent members, France, Russia and China refused to accept that resolution 1441 provided an automatic endorsement for US military action on Iraq. The fiasco of the attempt to get a second resolution passed is significant because for the first time in recent history, the United States could not pressurise or coerce the United Nations to fall in line by endorsing its war. The fact that the United States could not muster the nine votes required for passing the resolution by the Security Council was in itself indicative of the widespread

opposition to the US move. There was no doubt, that the US would go ahead with its war even if the UN did not sanction it. However, the refusal by the Security Council to legitimize the US war shows that the resistance to American unilateralism is growing.

Underlying the failure of the United States to gain UN authorization is the sharpening of inter-imperialist contradictions, a phenomenon not in evidence for more than two decades. France and Germany, the two biggest countries in the European Union, were apprehensive of the prospects of the US capturing Iraq and consolidating its dominance over the Gulf region. Both in terms of Europe's dependence on the oil supplies from the region and the brazen efforts to assert American dominance, made the war of Iraq an issue on which both the major European powers had to voice their opposition. Underlying this divergence was also the conflict about the preeminence of the dollar and the challenge posed by the Euro. Russia, another major country in Europe now in the capitalist orbit, lined up with France and Germany. The US was served notice that its pursuit of a new world order centering on its absolute hegemony would be challenged.

The struggle in the Security Council and the diplomatic skirmishes during the build up towards the war took place in the background of the biggest anti-war mobilisation ever seen particularly the February 15 protest marches. The spectacular protests definitely show a growing mass consciousness about the dangers of the reckless and adventurist course embarked upon by US imperialism. It is significant that the biggest mass protests took place in those very countries whose governments are supporting the US war effort – Britain, Australia, Italy and Spain. In the West, the mass anti-war movement was preceded by three years of anti-globalisation protest movements. Increasingly, the link between imperialist driven globalisation and war became established for millions of people.

The anti-war protests during the Vietnam war did radicalize a section of the people particularly the young who were drawn

into the movement. The historic mobilisations which preceded the Iraq war saw another noteworthy feature. In Britain and Australia and to some extent in the United States school students organised and come out into the streets to protest the war. Such large-scale participation of school students in the anti-war movement has never happened before. The radicalization which will come about among sections of these youth, augurs well for the future of the Left in these countries.

The relentless American drive for total domination in the past one decade, the military pummeling of small states, the threats of intervention to change governments and systems not to its liking, its unilateral acts bypassing international norms and forums, have led to a sense of despondency in some progressive circles. The unrelenting onslaughts, the patently unjust economic order imposed on the poorer countries and the use of blockades, sanctions and open military intervention, create the grounds for pessimism and anxiety.

But it would be a mistake to see only this side of the picture. As with all "empires" there are limits to the powers of the sole hegemon. These limitations express themselves in the political, economic and military spheres. Firstly, the imperialist driven globalisation and the imposition of neo-liberal policies around the world have their own dynamics. The operations of predatory finance capital and the imposition of neo-liberal policies in country after country have led to growing inequalities, loss of livelihood and widening poverty which are now finding expression through gathering discontent. Both the gulf between the rich and the poor countries and the sharp division between the rich and the poor within nations are setting off reactions over which the US imperial order have no control. This is starkly seen in South America. In country after country the neo-liberal policies stands discredited and it is becoming difficult for the ruling classes to impose that model.

The spectacle of the use of American military power with its vast technological superiority is a deliberate and conscious

demonstration. The Bush administration is increasingly flaunting military power and to use it as a lever to reorder the world. Such brutal and destructive power is a serious threat to the lives and security of people all around the world. However, the brute use of military power cannot be the basis for the enduring success of US imperial aims. The limits of such military power was evident in Afghanistan. The use of missiles, precision guided bombs and other high-tech weaponry helped minimize US casualties and to subdue the weaker adversary but it has not led to political and social structures which America wants to put in place. In Afghanistan, this is exemplified by the fact that the handpicked ruler of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, has to be constantly guarded by US special forces and his writ does not run in many parts of the country. Even the much vaunted aim of eliminating the Taliban leadership and the Al Qaeda could not be fully accomplished.

In Iraq, a much more developed society with a deep nationalist tradition, it will be all the more difficult for American military occupation to provide any political and social legitimacy to a pliant regime. Iraqi resistance and a protracted struggle against the colonial occupation is bound to develop. Not only will the conflict in Iraq not end, the entire region will be thrown into turmoil. Israel will seize the opportunity to crush the Palestinian movement and the pro-American regimes in the region will come under severe strain. Hence, Iraq, unlike Afghanistan, will prove to be a turning point. The rhetoric of American imperialism with its hypocritical cant of ensuring a world free of terror safe for democracy and human rights is violently different from the experience of American power for people around the world. They see the imperial power as greedy for super profits, bent upon cornering natural resources like oil and willing to trample upon national sovereignties and resort to brute military force to maintain its hegemony. Notwithstanding the compromises and patch-up which will be arrived at between US-Britain and France, Germany and Russia, the challenge to a unipolar US dominated world has begun.

By any reckoning the struggle against this new bestial form

of imperialism and American power will be a protracted and difficult one. It is important to draw the proper lessons from the latest imperialist adventure in Iraq. While outrage against the beast on the rampage and grief at the terrible sufferings of the Iraqi people are natural, there is no scope for despair and pessimism. After a long time, since the danger of fascism moved millions of people, the spectacle of a US empire founded on brute military might has moved tens of millions of people around the world to protest and oppose the war. The "global coalition against terrorism" was reduced to a pathetic "coalition of the willing". At no time since the Second World War, when US supremacy in the imperialist bloc got established, has America been so isolated from the rest of the world.

It is in the nature of the imperialist beast that more predatory attacks are in the offing. It will herald more battles to be fought in the future. Such battles should hopefully draw more popular forces and countries together.

(*The Marxist*, January-March, 2003)

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1 See Vijay Prashad: The Arrogance of Empire, an assessment of the Bush Doctrine, The Marxist, July-December 2002

2 Towards The Precipice: Robert Brenner, London Review of Books, February 2003

3 See Prakash Karat: Global War Against Terrorism, Extension of American Hegemony, The Marxist, July-December 2001

4 Bob Woodward: Bush at War, Simon & Schuster, 2002

5 quoted from Fred Goldstein: Bush can't sell war for empire, Workers World, January 16, 2003

6 The Indian Express, 1 February and 8 February 2003.

The American Occupation of Iraq

The main purpose of the US war on Iraq was the occupation of the country. After the invasion and fighting which lasted three weeks, the Occupation has become a reality. Nothing signifies this more starkly than the arrival of retired Lieutenant General Jay Garner in Baghdad on April 21. He is the new governor of Iraq. History is repeating itself. In 1918 after the first world war, the British colonized the three provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra which were earlier part of the Turkish Ottoman empire. Thus modern Iraq was constituted. Iraq was governed by British Civil Commissioners, till the monarchy was setup. Garner is the pro-Consul of this new acquisition of the United States. He is taking over in his capacity as head of the Pentagon's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance. He has as his deputy, a British officer Major-General Tim Cross. But the shots will be called by the Americans. More than 400 military and civilian officers will man Garner's administration. Much before the war began, the Bush administration had worked out the plans for the Occupation. The purpose of the Occupation is not just a short-term or temporary goal. It is the remaking of Iraq into a client state.

The efforts to covert Iraq into a American protectorate are to be undertaken in three stages. Firstly, a military governor who answers to the head of Central Command Tommy Franks and the Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. This is to be followed by an interim administration run by handpicked Iraqis whose loyalty to Washington will be vouchsafed. The third stage would be holding

elections and having an Iraqi government which can be paraded as an embodiment of the Iraqi people's will.

The New York Times had set out this plan as early as January 2003 based on Administration sources. Later the same newspaper outlined the ministries and the personnel who have been chosen to run them drawing upon American diplomats, officials from various US government departments and the private sector.

The retired general Garner has not been chosen only for his military background. He happens to be a top executive of a corporation called L-3 Communications which produces defence equipment. The company earned $4 billion dollars revenue in 2002 by mainly supplying the Pentagon with equipment like avionics. Many of the missiles which hit Baghdad had guidance systems made by Garner's company. So the new governor can be relied upon to look after not only the interests of the Pentagon but also the corporates of America.

How long will the first phase of an American occupation regime continue? Garner on reaching Baghdad refused to set a time-frame. "We'll be turning portions of the government over to them, not in any time phase, but when they're ready to accept it" he said. Ahmad Chalabi, the favourite agent of the Pentagon, hoped that the setting up an interim administration will be done in a few weeks time and the drafting of a new constitution and holding elections, will be completed in two years. But according to the Washington Post, Richard Lugar, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee said installing a strong democratic regime will require at least five years as the US did not plan adequately for the post-war period.

The Americans will stay and govern till the whole business of setting up the lucrative deals for the reconstruction of the country is underway. Secondly, the US have to put their plans for the oil sector into operation. Even before the war was over, the rebuilding of the Umm Qasr port was given to an American company, so was the quelling of the oil field fires to a Halliburton subsidiary. The

latter decision came in for a lot of criticism because Dick Cheney was formerly the head of Halliburton. Now the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has announced that the first contract for reconstruction has been awarded to the giant Bechtel Corp worth $ 34 million. This is expected to go upto $680 million in the next 18 months.

The war destroyed Iraq's infrastructure and facilities. Now America's corporations can be given the task of building them, of course, making a profit in the bargain. The American tax payer cannot naturally be burdened with this cost. So the Iraqi people will have to pay for it. In the war appropriations Bush has got from the Congress, out of the $75 billion, only $3.5 billion is set aside for relief and reconstruction. The bulk of the funds will have come from the revenue generated by the sale of Iraqi oil.

This explains Bush's hurry in wanting to end the U.N. sanctions on Iraq. After doggedly insisting on sanctions which have destroyed Iraq's economy and society, the US has now done an about face. The sanctions continuing means that the United Nations will decide how Iraq's oil can be sold and the proceeds utilized. The US wants to decide these matters, so the sanctions should go.

The US refuses to accept any major role for the U.N. in the interim administration. Even Blair found himself in an embarrassing position after publicly stating that the U.N. should have a key role in the post-war set up. The reason for this refusal is straightforward and simple. The US is determined not to allow anyone to share in the spoils of war. The spending of Iraqi oil revenues by the US for reconstruction is unacceptable. America and Britain must pay for the cost of rebuilding what they have destroyed.

The big business in India is hoping to get some crumbs from the table of the big US corporates. The Larsen & Toubro managing director was to have left for the US to solicit sub-contracts from Bechtel, Halliburton and others. FICCI announced that a delegation would go to New York to lobby for contracts. A

US Congress delegation met the Industry Minister Arun Jaitley and hoped that India would participate in the reconstruction activities. The Vajpayee government would support the moves to get sub-contracts. However, this would be an immoral stand. Indian companies hope to get a small share of the profit from the US occupation and Iraq's oil revenues. This would amount to exploiting the misery of the Iraqi people. The Vajpayee government must demand a UN sponsored interim administration and the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. Till American occupation is ended, the Indian government should not allow Indian companies to accept contracts in Iraq.

What will happen to the oil is the key question. In the pre-war occupation plans, this was left vague. The game plan seems to be as follows:

The immediate task is to resume the pumping out of the oil ready for shipment. The revenues from the oil sales should finance the US reconstruction project by the American companies. In the second stage, the United States would see how both the exploration of the oil reserves and the production and distribution of oil can be organised so that the American interests are served. There is already talk of reviving the oil pipeline project from Mosul in Northern Iraq to the Haifa port in Israel. The pipeline would go through Jordan which is within the US orbit instead of Syria. Israel, Jordan and a pliable government in Iraq can come to an agreement on such a project. This would be of immense benefit to both Israel and the United States. The extreme rightwing lobbies in the United States are already demanding the privatisation of the Oil industry in Iraq. If Iraq's huge oil reserves can be parceled out to private companies, not just on lease for exploration but with ownership, that would be a dream realized for the oil giants.

Already the designs on Iraqi oil have alarmed Iraq's neighbours and the Arab states. In a meeting held in the Saudi Arabian capital, foreign ministers of six neighbouring states of Iraq (Iran, Turkey, Syria, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia) apart from Egypt and Bahrain opposed the lifting of UN sanctions against

Iraq till a legitimate government was formed in Iraq and warned against Iraq's oil being exploited by foreigners.

In the meantime, the remaking of Iraq proceeds. The Americans have decided to introduce the dollar as the currency in use till a new currency system can be evolved. Twenty judges and lawyers have been recruited to remake Iraq's judicial system. A new police and army have to be built up.

The implanting of democracy in Iraq will proceed on the lines of the earlier colonial enterprise of the British. Britain in the first phase had directly governed Iraq after the mandate was given to it by the League of Nations. This phase lasted till 1920, after which a constitutional monarchy was appointed and a government set up with a bicameral parliament in 1926. The British got the Iraqi government to sign an Anglo-Iraqi Treaty in 1922 which gave the British the right to maintain bases for its air force. An oil agreement was signed in 1925 handing over the oil wealth to the Anglo-American oil companies. Iraq became nominally independent in 1932 but British tutelage continued. The Americans hope to emulate the British by setting up a pliant government with an elected parliament.

Both in the case of oil and the military relationship, America will have the upper hand. *The New York Times* quoted a senior US government official stating that "There will be some kind of long term defence relationship with a new Iraq similar to Afghanistan. The scope of that is yet to be defined – whether it will be full-up operational bases, smaller forward operating bases or just plain access — to be decided". There is talk of at least four permanent military bases in Iraq. Here again, the model will be Afghanistan where American forces are entrenched in permanent bases and special forces continue to operate all round the country.

The Pentagon and Donald Rumsfeld would like the American sponsored Iraq National Congress and its leader Ahmed Chalabi to take over as soon as possible. The state department and the CIA have their objections about Chalabi being elevated as the leader of

the new set up. The state department had given millions of dollars to Chalabi and later complained that he had misappropriated the money. The CIA's assessment is that he is a rootless leader who has not been in Iraq for the past forty-five years. But Chalabi is backed by the hawks in the Defense department.

Two weeks ago the Pentagon sent Chalabi with 600 of his so-called "Free Iraq Fighters" into An Nasaryah in southern Iraq. From there he has now reached Baghdad. Another Shia cleric chosen by America, Abdel Majid Khoei was sent into Najef escorted by special American forces. Within days he was hacked to death by other factions who saw him as an American agent. The Americans and the British are also patronizing tribal chieftains who from the old days formed the main landlords and oppressors.

How to create a "democratic" government out of this motley crowd is a problem which is much more difficult than what was attempted in Afghanistan. Already the end of the Baathist regime has led to a resurgence of Shia sentiments and assertion. Whatever its past sins and repressive record, the Baathist regime was secular and the vacuum created is being filled by religious forces, tribal chiefs and ethnic ties. The new colonialists would seek to exploit these divisions as in the days of the British empire. But the Iraqi people forged their nationhood in the fight against colonial oppression. The Shias fought the British as determinedly and valiantly as the Sunnis. It took them nearly four decades to end British suzerainty when in 1958 they overthrew the puppet regime. The demonstrations demanding the Americans quit Iraq have begun.

The American occupiers will soon learn that history is repeating itself not only by bringing colonization back to Iraq but also by opening a new chapter of resistance to neo-colonialism.

(*People's Democracy*, April 21-27, 2003)

Parallels in the Past

Remembering history is important. For an oppressed people, the memories of the struggle against colonialism and for nationhood are vital when all other resources are taken over and appropriated by the oppressors. It is also important to look back into history if one has to understand the motivations for the current occupation and the pattern of dominance which America seeks to impose on Iraq. The occupation of Iraq is the first American imperial project in a major Arab country. But for the Iraqi people it is not a new venture. When Lieutenant General Jay Garner assumes the governorship of Iraq, he will be following in the footsteps of Arnold Talbot Wilson, the first British pro-Consul in Iraq from 1918 to 1920.

The Iraqi people will not be mistaken if they believe they are back to the days of old style colonialism when imperial powers determined their destinies. All through the buildup to the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the Western media and the ruling circles of the Anglo-American axis have been busy making the world forget the central aim of the current military adventure – a return to empire and the recolonisation of Iraq. But for those who have even a passing knowledge of the history of the Middle East and for the people of Iraq, the writing on the wall was clear.

The land of ancient Mesopotamia, which became modern Iraq, was colonized by the British at the end of the First World War. The defeat and collapse of the Turkish Ottoman empire led to the British and the French dividing up the Arab lands of the erstwhile empire. The British and French imperialists struck a secret deal in 1916 known as the Sykes-Picot pact. The Arabs came to know that they were being cheated of their freedom only when

Soviet Russia released the details after the October revolution. Trans-Jordan and Iraq went to the British and Syria and Lebanon to France. Egypt and Libya were already under British tutelage.

The League of Nations, set up in 1919, gave the British the mandate to run Jordan and Iraq. The British declared the hashemite chief Faisal as the King of Iraq; earlier he was made the King of Syria, but was deposed by the French. In 1920, began the fiction of Arab rule while Iraq continued as a British protectorate. The Iraqis, from the outset, refused to accept the British as their new masters. The Arab Shias, who are now sought to be portrayed as welcoming the new American masters, rose in revolt along with the others. The British took months to put down the rebellion. How they did it is an illustration of imperialist cost-benefit analysis, something which the new imperialists, the Americans, have taken forward and perfected.

The problem for the British was the mounting cost to the exchequer in maintaining a huge army in the Middle East. The solution was found in the use of aerial bombing by the Royal Air Force (RAF). From 1915, the British had been bombing off and on recalcitrant Pathans in the north-west frontier in India, and other malcontents in Egypt, Afghanistan and Somaliland. But it was in Iraq that the genocidal use of aerial bombing was pioneered. As a historian of Iraq's colonial experience, Peter Slugglet, observed, "The British decided to rule on the cheap, as it were. To police the territory, they called in the Royal Air Force. This was the first known use of airpower as constabulary." The head of the RAF in Iraq stated: "If the Arabs had nothing to fight against on the ground, and no loot to be obtained, and nobody to kill, but have to deal with airplanes which are out of their reach, they are certain to come in and there will no risk of disaster or heavy causalities such as are always suffered by small infantry patrols in uncivilized countries."

All through 1921, the British used the airforce to bomb the rebellious Arabs. Another writer Pelletiere noted, "In time, the

British expanded the use of the RAF, sending it on all sorts of assignments. For example, it would bomb the tribes to soften them up for visits from the tax collector. It bombed preemptively – at the first rumor of revolt, the planes would be dispatched to incinerate croplands."

Winston Churchill was the War Secretary at that time. He was delighted to learn that the RAF could be used for what was called "control without occupation". According to Sven Lindqvist, author of *A History of Bombing*, Churchill "offered the RAF six million pounds to take control of the Iraqi operation from the army, which had cost eighteen million thus far". Lindqvist describes how the revolt of 1920 was put down. "In principle, the inhabitants were supposed to be warned before a raid. In principle, house, animals, and soldiers were supposed to be targets, and not the elderly, women, or children. In practice, things didn't always go that way. The first report from Baghdad describes an air raid that causes wild confusion among the natives and their families. 'Many of them jumped into a lake, making a good target for the machine guns' ".

According to Lindqvist, Churchill professed to be shocked by such wanton killing, "To fire willfully on women and children taking refuge in a lake is a disgraceful act, and I am surprised that you do not order the officers responsible for it to be tried by court martial . . .". Yet, the bombing continued as Churchill found it prudent to rely on the airforce which had saved him the cost of keeping fifty-one battalions of soldiers in Iraq.

In the Iraq War I and II, in 1991 and 2003 and the intervening period, the Americans built upon the economies of bombing applied by the British in those early days. The US Air Force (USAF) is thus following the hoary traditions of the RAF. Only they are using more lethal and destructive munitions such as cluster bombs, bunker busters and fuel-air explosives. The RAF then used a few score planes, the USAF deployed more than 600 war planes for their "Operation Iraqi Freedom". The use of such aerial

bombardment led to the murder and mutilation of women and children, the RAF found out quite early in its bombing campaigns. The die-hard imperialist circles rationalized this cost as a regrettable necessity to put down the savage people who were untouched by civilization. The modern imperialists call it collateral damage.

The natives kept revolting all though the twenties. So Britain decided to grant them independence in 1932. But there was a catch. Iraq would remain under the paternal care of the British as a protectorate, though the term was not used. Faisal continued as the monarch, but he had a new Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, a chum and agent of Colonel T.E. Lawrence (romanticized in imperialist lore as Lawrence of Arabia). Under him Iraq became a police state.

The colonial set-up in Iraq drew much of its personnel and experience from the officers who manned the empire in India. Like in India, the chieftains were made the owners of land, where land was formerly held in common. They were now made the property of the chiefs. By the fifties, 55 percent of the cultivable land was owned by 2484 individuals. The sheikhs and the aghas lorded over the peasants and had to keep them down with armed gangs.

The saga of the Iraq Petroleum Company mirrors what happened with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in Iran and the Aramco in Saudi Arabia. The unbelievable oil riches of Iraq fell into the lap of the British oil companies and their counterparts in France. The US muscled in later in 1928. The IPC shares were owned by the Anglo-Persian Oil Co. 23.75 per cent, Shell 23.75 per cent, Compagne Francaise 23.75 per cent, the American Near East Development Corporation (consisting of Exxon and Mobil) 23.75 per cent and an individual who originally thought up the idea of such a company, Gubenkein 5 per cent. The British and American companies together held a three quarters share.

Iraq was shackled by the Anglo-American Treaty of 1922 which legalized the British military occupation and the 1925 oil agreement which confirmed its vassal status. Said Aburish, a writer

on Arab affairs and a former consultant to the Iraqi government noted, "The agreement between the British and Iraq regarding the rights to the oil of the country is one of the most criminal documents I have ever read in my life. It is aimed at keeping Iraq in the dark ages."

All through the colonial occupation, the Iraqis kept fighting. According to the historian Hanna Batatu, between 1921 and 1958, there were no fewer than thirty significant violent revolts of one sort or another. It was the 1920 rebellion by the Arabs, both Shia and Sunni, which began the shaping of the Iraqi national identity. Like in many other colonial countries, Iraq began the tortuous process of forging its nationhood through the bitter and protracted fight against the imperial power and its puppet regime. In the present-day world, when pax Britannica has become pax Americana, every effort is being made to foster the divide between Sunni and Shia, Arabs and Kurds. Iraqi history is replete with such tactics of divide and rule from the early decades of the 20th century. For the Iraqi people who valiantly and without respite fought their colonisers, the new occupation will not be tolerable. The protracted struggle against the new colonisers is about to begin.

As for Tony Blair and his pious cant about liberating the Iraqi people from dictatorship, it would be instructive to study the role of past Labour governments towards Iraq. The Labour government elected in 1929, reviewed the 1922 treaty and got a new one signed in 1930. It made vague promises of independence for Iraq in the future but extracted concessions which only underlined the subjugated status of the country. This was followed by Portsmouth Treaty 18 years later, which was negotiated by another Labour government in 1948. It was this agreement when signed, but not ratified, that sparked off the *Al-Wathbah*, the biggest mass insurrection against the puppet regime in which the Iraqi Communist Party played a prominent role. After days of mass protests, Nuri Said ordered the police to machine gun the people. Three to four hundred died in the streets of Baghdad on 27th

January 1948.

Tony Blair seems to have forgotten what happened when the British experimented with providing democracy to Iraq. Under a constitutional monarchy, a bicameral parliament was set up in 1924. But it was a farce. Under Nuri Said's dictatorship even as late as 1954, 122 out of 135 seats were won unopposed, half being filled up by semi-feudal landlords. *The New Statesmen* in 1958 gave an accurate description of the Nuri Said regime as one with "a very efficient, British trained police force, innumerable spies and agents provocateurs, a controlled press and a complacent parliament dominated by the big southern landowners who are his main national supporters'. Blair had railed against some of the similar anti-democratic features of the Saddam regime, which the British could tolerate and protect in the 1950s. But there is, of course, an important difference. Unlike Nuri Said, the Baathists had nationalised the oil industry in 1972.

The build up towards the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 has a historic parallel in the past. For the first time, Iraq became an independent state and a republic in July 1958. The popular upheaval which overthrew the Nuri Said regime was a revolutionary step. General Abdul Karim Kassem took power with the support of all sections of the people, except the feudals and the compradors. Nuri Said who sought to escape was caught and executed.

How did the Americans and the British react? By gunboat diplomacy. The US landed 5,000 marines in Lebanon and the British sent its paratroopers into Jordan. The British were indignant that the Iraqi people could be presumptuous enough to decide who would run their country. *The Times* of July 15 wrote: "If the revolt succeeds it could be a disaster for the West. Britain and the NATO powers might well be deprived of their important staging rights through the Iraqi aerodromes. . . . Iraq, besides being itself an important supplier of oil to the United Kingdom, is the lynchpin on which the whole British position in the Persian Gulf,

her main source of oil supplies, depends."

Rajani Palme Dutt, the prominent British Communist, wrote in the *Labour Monthly* which he edited: "How will the Western powers react? Already before the revolution in Iraq they were engaged in massing their forces for their counter-offensive in the Middle East, specifically with relation to Lebanon and Jordan. The massive British airlift to Cyprus had already stationed there the great part of Britain's mobile strategic reserve in readiness for action. The American Sixth Fleet had been moved into position; the marines had been dispatched. The unstable puppet rulers in Lebanon and Jordan, faced with the implacable hostility of their own peoples, will only too eagerly, if occasion arises, offer the Western powers the pretext for intervention." He warned that the British and Americans would seek to legitimize their military intervention as an act of self defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Invoking Article 51, the right to self-defence as a pretext for aggression, was what Dutt then termed "the new fashionable imperialist interpretation of the Charter". It is still in fashion today. For it is precisely this "right of self defence" that Bush and his cohorts cited to launch their pre-emptive military attack. Self defence in the face of the imaginary threats from the terrorist groups linked to the Iraqi regime or from its weapons of mass destruction.

If the July uprising of 1958 succeeded, it was because the world situation was radically different from what it is today. British and American military intervention was stayed by the existence of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union recognized the Kassem government on 19th July. It conducted military exercises in Transcaucasia and Turkmenistan to counter the Anglo-American mobilisation. It proposed an early end to the confrontation. The matter eventually went to the UN but imperialist intervention, in the face of a Soviet veto, was not possible.

After the Second World War, the decline of British imperial influence set in accompanied by the ascendance of US power. The

Baghdad Pact was formed in 1955 with the blessings of America to counter the Soviet threat. It consisted of Britain, Iraq, Persia and Pakistan. The headquarters was in Baghdad and the General Secretary was an Iraqi. The 1958 revolution took Iraq out of the imperialist orbit.

The wheel has come a full circle now. After being an independent state since 1958, Iraq will be reintegrated into the imperialist chain as an American protectorate. The US has replaced Britain as the hegemon of the region and the arguments set out in 1958 for gunboat diplomacy were trotted out to occupy Iraq forty-five years later. Britain is a very junior partner in the Iraqi enterprise of the United States, a pathetic parody of its imperial role in the heady days of the early twentieth century. Ghosts of empire seem to haunt the successors of Bevin and Gaitskell in the Labour Party leadership.

The record of chicanery and loot which marked the British suzerainty over Iraq is going to be surpassed by the new imperial warriors of Bush. Lieutenant General Jay Garner is not just the chosen man of Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defense Secretary. He is also a representative of corporate America and its arms manufacturers. Garner is on leave from the company he works for, L-3 Communications, which is a defence contractor for the Pentagon. It has a revenue of four billion dollars annually. Some of the precision guided missiles used to attack Iraq had technology supplied by Garner's company. This is what the American occupation is all about, combining military power with profits.

In one sense, the American occupiers are different from the earlier British ones. Some of the key figures in the British imperialist enterprise in the Middle East were acutely conscious of the grand history of Mesopotamia. Gertrude Bell was one of them. She was an Arabist, linguist and worked for British intelligence during the First World War. She helped draw the boundaries of Iraq and became an adviser to King Faisal. She was also deeply interested in archeology and founded the first archeological

museum when she was the Honorary Director of Antiquities. Her grave lies not far from the National Museum in Baghdad. As the treasures of the museum were looted and vandalized, the precious legacy of Iraq which extends back to the earliest centres of human civilization disappeared at one stroke. Gertrude Bell would have been horrified and inconsolable at such destruction. Not so the American occupiers, who stood by and watched the pillage. It happened again with the National Library. The new barbarians have truly arrived.

(*Frontline*, May 9, 2003)

The Heroic Legacy of the Iraqi Communist Party

Is there a Communist party in Iraq? If so, what has it been doing? This is a question which was often asked during the invasion of Iraq and its occupation. The news that the first newspaper to be circulated in Baghdad after the American occupation was of the Communist party came as a surprise to many. There are very few people in India, even among the Communists, who know much about the Iraqi Communist Party.

A brief description of the stormy and heroic story of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) is given here. It is only a bare sketch of the main events, but it should help the reader to understand the eventful and tragic history of a party which grew to be the largest Communist party in the Middle East. It became the most influential force in the country at the time of the "July 1958 revolution" which overthrew the British supported regime and established a republic. The ICP suffered serious bouts of repression, the worst being in 1963. No other Communist party, with the exception of the Indonesian party, faced such brutal terror as the party in Iraq.

The saga of the ICP and its tortuous ups and downs is most vividly and authoritatively documented in Hanna Batuta's *The Old Classes and Revolutionary Movements in Iraq: A Study of Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists and Free Officers* (Princeton 1978). This remarkable book is the basis for much of the information on the ICP in this piece.

There is an interesting parallel in the way Communist ideas developed in India and Iraq, both British colonies in the 1920s. In

both countries, the anti-imperialist fighters got inspiration from the October revolution. In fact, the first Iraqi to imbibe Marxist ideas did visit India.

The first intellectual to be influenced by Marxist ideas in Iraq was Husain al-Rahhal. His parents decided to send him for studies in Europe. He boarded a ship from Basra which went to Karachi enroute to Europe. Rahhal got down at Karachi and spent more than a year in India. It is reported that his stay in India brought him in touch with radical ideas which further matured during his studies in Europe. Like many western educated young people of his generation, the reading of *Labour Monthly* edited by Rajani Palme Dutt, which was available in Baghdad, helped him to understand Communist politics. The first Marxist study circle (Jamati) was set up by Rahhal along with some of his friends in 1924 which included Mahmud Ahmad Sayyid one of the first novelists of Iraq.

The years 1920 to 1932 was the period of direct British rule of Iraq under the mandate provided by the League of Nations. It is in this period that industry and railways developed throwing up a modern working class. The first organised strike was by the railway workers in 1927 and the first union was set up by the railway workers in 1929.

The ICP was founded in 1934. It was preceeded by the work of Communist groups in places like Basra in southern Iraq which threw up the first organiser and outstanding leader of the Communist party. His name was Yusuf Salman Yusuf who came to be known as Fahd (the Leopard). Fahd was selected by the Comintern to study at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. Fahd was arrested in 1933 and he became the first Iraqi to defend himself in court as a Communist.

The Communist Party became the leading Left force in the country fighting against imperialism and the oppression of the feudal landlords. Right from the beginning, the fledgling party had to face severe repression at the hands of the successive Iraqi

governments which were under the tutelage of the British. In 1935, the secretary of the party Asin Flayyeh was arrested and its printing press confiscated. In August 1937, the parliament declared communism in Iraq illegal. The penal code provided for punishment by death or penal servitude for life for dissemination of communism among the armed forces or the police. Fahd took over as General Secretary of the party in 1941 and under his leadership the party consolidated its organisation and his activities enhanced the prestige among the people. The heroic struggle of the Soviet people against Nazi Germany attracted more people to the Communist ideology. In 1944 the first party conference was held which drafted the party's national charter. This charter was approved by the first national congress of the party in April 1945. The Congress elected a central committee.

The Iraqi Communist Party was not based on any single community or ethnic group. Right from the outset it attracted the best men and women from all sections of the working people and the intelligentsia. In the 1940s, the cadres and leaders were drawn from Arab Shias and Sunnis and the Kurds were always a significant proportion. From amongst the minorities, Christians and Jews (till the fifties) were found in the leadership. In fact, Fahd, the most important leader was of Christian origin. The Baath Party which forcibly supplanted the ICP borrowed many of the progressive features of the Communists, though it distorted them in practice. The only legacy of the days of the anti-imperialist struggle which the Baath could not abandon was the secular character of the State.

The period 1944 to 1946 saw the expansion of trade union activities and out of the 16 trade unions formed in this period 12 were led by the Communist party. During this period, the Communist party set up its units in Iraqi Kurdistan. The party consistently supported the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people and later for their autonomy. The first peasant uprising against a landed sheikh in the Iraqi countryside took place in village Arbat in 1947. The growing activities and mass influence of

the ICP alarmed the puppet government and their British mentors. A serious blow was struck at the party when Fahd and several leaders were arrested in January 1947. They were charged with conspiring to overthrow the government. Fahd and another member of the Polit Bureau Zaki Basin were sentenced to death. Because of an international campaign to save their lives, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

It is during this period that the ICP emerged as the key political force in the country when the great national uprising known as *Al-Wathbah* (the Leap) took place in January 1948. The uprising was sparked off by the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty between the British and Iraqi governments. The treaty continued to subjugate Iraq with military bases and other curbs on its sovereignty. Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated in the streets of Baghdad led by the Communists. 400 people were shot dead in the streets of the city by police manning machine guns. The Prime Minister fled the country and the government was forced to be repudiate the treaty. Along with the mass upsurge came a wave of workers strikes and in April 1948 the historic march from Haditha oil pumping station by 3000 workers to Baghdad 250 kms away electrified the country.

The reactionary government gradually regained control after declaring a state of emergency. The repression that followed saw hundreds of Communists being held and sentenced in summary trials. General Secretary Fahd and two members of the Polit Bureau Zaki Basim and Al Shabibi who were in prison were retried and sentenced to death. Their sentences were carried out in the middle of the night. As he was led to the gallows Fahd declared defiantly that "we have bodies and thoughts; you may destroy our bodies but not our thoughts". The bodies of the three leaders were hung for display in three different parts of the city to terrorise the people. The repression against the Communists made the ICP known as the 'party of martyrs' and the respect and admiration of the people for the party grew immensely.

In the early fifties, the Party rebuilt itself and a new

youthful leadership took up the challenge. Another wave of mass struggles developed culminating in the *Intifada* in November 1952. A feature of this was the struggle of peasants against the landlords under the leadership of the peasant societies organised by the party. The army was called in to suppress the revolts. In end 1954, the Party decided to organise a national committee for the union of soldiers and officers as more and more soldiers became politically active in the mass struggles and movements. The period upto 1958 saw the steady ascent of the party and the growth of its mass organisations. Thus the party was positioned to be the main force in the revolutionary uprising which took place in July 1958 which overthrew the hated puppet regime and saw the nationalist army led by Gen. Qasim take power. By 1959, 250,000 workers had joined trade unions; there were 3000 peasant associations in the villages representing 200,000 peasants; the Iraqi Women's League had 20,000 members and the Democratic Youth Federation 84,000 members. Significantly, a number of army officers and soldiers also joined the Communist party.

The Communists played a significant role in the revolutionary upheaval of 1958. It frightened the new ruling circles and the national bourgeoisie with its growing power. The influence of the Communist party was at its height and land reform measures and labour laws had to be brought in to meet the popular demands. Big demonstrations took place demanding that the Communists be included in the new government but the nationalist army officers and the bourgeoisie refused to consider such a demand. On 1st May 1959, 300,000 people marched through Baghdad raising the demand for the participation of the Communist party in the government. The party withdrew the demand for being part of the government in July 1959. The Central Committee took this decision stating that there were serious misgivings among various sections of the bourgeoisie and moderate forces. The reformist section in the Party leadership prevailed. The giving up of this demand led to stepping up of the repression against the Communists. By 1960 a new round of attacks began. The Qasim

regime refused to legalise the Communist party when it applied for a licence when all other parties were granted recognition. Later the party recognized its mistake in retreating from the slogan of setting up of a revolutionary democratic government with Communist participation.

The line of capitulating to Qasim and the national bourgeoisie was also adopted because of the influence of the CPSU. It may be recalled that it was in the late fifties (after the 20th Congress of the CPSU) that the Soviet party began advocating the line of uniting with the national bourgeoisie and undermining the independent role of the Communist party. The Iraqi party, like many other parties in the third world, did not escape the consequences of the Soviet dictated approach.

The new republic set up in 1958 marked the emergence of the truly independent state of Iraq. Qasim under the influence of progressive forces introduced a whole range of measures which broke with the old pro-imperialist regime. Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact and the British military bases were vacated, a programme of land reforms and legal rights for trade unions and other democratic organisations were announced. An important step taken by the Qasim government was to clip the wings of the Iraq Petroleum Company which was owned by the Anglo-American oil companies. The government decided to severely restrict the company's right to exploitation of the concessions granted to it. But a radical regime relying on Communist support was something which the national bourgeoisie could not countenance for long. The Qasim regime weakened itself by striking at the main pillar of its support – the Communists.

Qasim became increasingly isolated from other political parties due to his autocratic ways and the stage was set for the reactionary coup in February 1963. A section of the nationalist armed forces officers joined hands with the Baath Party to overthrow Qasim who was executed. It was only the Communists who brought out the people from the slums of Baghdad armed with sticks to face the tanks and machine guns. The resistance to the

coup was crushed by the superior military force.

The ouster of Qasim led to the ferocious bloodbath of the Communists. It was the darkest period for the ICP. At least 3000 Communists were executed and thousands more were jailed. It is reported that the CIA handed over lists of Communists to the Baath leaders and the coup plotters before the coup began. The first secretary of the party, Husain ar-Radi, was arrested from his hideout. He was brutally tortured for four days and died without divulging anything to the torturers. The terror against the Communists and progressives in the days after the coup d'etat was worse than what the Pinochet regime inflicted upon the Left in Chile a decade later. The National Guard of the Baathist party dragged out Communists held in detention under the Qasim regime and shot them. The Iraqi Communist Party sources put the number of their members and supporters killed during the first three days of the coup at 5000. Sports grounds, military camps and schools were turned into concentration camps and interrogation centres for tens of thousands of people from all walks of life. The party had to retreat and set up its partisan forces in the Kurd areas.*

The Baath regime did not last long and fell in November 1963. Those who took over the reins of power consisted of a coalition of army officers who were pan-Arab nationalists and Nasserites who looked to Egypt for inspiration. The military regime lasted till 1968 when the Baath party staged a comeback through a military coup carried out with the help of a section of the army officers. From then onwards the Baath party manoeuvred to consolidate its position while eliminating all opposition. In its drive for total hegemony, the Baath party continued its repression of the Communist party. Till 1971 the brutal suppression of the Communists continued even though the ICP called for a constitutional framework embodying democratic principles with free elections, the solution of the Kurdish problem based on autonomy and the abolition of concessions to foreign companies. The ICP called for the formation of a patriotic front of all progressive forces and a

coalition government. The Baath party was faced with an international situation where it could take steps to break the stranglehold of the Iraq Petroleum Company. The necessity to modernize capitalism required the using of oil resources for accumulation of capital. Relations with the Soviet Union took a new turn when the Iraqi government sought its for help in oil production and the first agreement was signed in 1969.

After prolonged negotiations in 1971-72 the Baath party came to an agreement with the ICP to form a progressive and patriotic national front on the basis of a national action charter. Two Communist ministers joined the government. By 1978 the Baath party turned against the Communists once again. It removed all representatives of the ICP in the patriotic front and they were arrested. In May 1978, 31 members and supporters of the ICP were executed on the pretext that they had set up Communist party cells in the armed forces. Underlying this new attack on the Communists was the burgeoning oil income after the sharp rise in oil prices in 1974. An understanding was arrived at with the Shah of Iran which helped the regime to stabilise. The Iraqis conceded the vital Shatt-al-Arab waterway to Iran in return for an undertaking to close the Iranian border to the Kurdish fighters from Iraq and suspension of military aid to them. In April 1979, the ICP declared that the patriotic front had ceased to be an alliance and had been converted into an instrument of the Baath party. The ICP announced its open opposition to the Baath regime in 1979, the year Saddam Hussein took over full powers as President. Later that year the Communist partisan units were set up in the Kurd areas.

Ever since the Baathists came to power they sought to suppress the Kurds by military activities. Between March 1974 and early 1975 a large number of civilians were killed in the Kurdish areas due to the Iraqi army operations. The Iraqi Communist Party forged an alliance with the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Kurdish Socialist Party in 1980 and vowed to continue the armed struggle against the regime. Since then, the party has been an

underground opposition force having suffered terrible losses following the policy of Baathization of Iraqi society and the establishment of a one-party authoritarian regime.

Many years later, when the US was set to attack Iraq, the ICP opposed any military intervention by America. Faced with the prospects of an American invasion of Iraq, the ICP refused to join the meeting of the opposition groups sponsored by the Americans in London in November 2002 which was meant to prepare the ground for setting up a pliant regime after the occupation of Iraq. The ICP stand was to oppose the Saddam regime and the American Occupation.

As the Iraqi people brace themselves up for a prolonged resistance to the American occupation and the imposition of a puppet regime, the ICP is once again poised at the crossroads. It has to face up to the challenge of developing a powerful democratic resistance to the imperialist occupation while building up the mass base of the party. In doing so, it will have to contend with the Islamist forces who wish to convert Iraq into a theocratic state. The rich and heroic legacy of the ICP in its first six decades should stand it in good stead in the difficult but challenging days ahead.

(*People's Democracy*, May 05-11, 2003)

Troops for Iraq:
No Yielding to American Pressure

The Vajpayee government is considering the US administration's request to send Indian troops to Iraq. The troops would serve as a police-cum-pacification force under the U.S. occupation. When reports first came about such a move, the Ministry of External Affairs denied there was such a request and stated that troops could be sent only under United Nations auspices. The Army followed up with its own denial stating that it had prepared a contingency plan for sending troops for United Nations-led peacekeeping missions "as a matter of routine".

However, these denials have not ended the matter. There is enough credible evidence that the US has asked India to send a division strong force as part of a contingent of troops from different countries who will be willing to work under the US military command.

The BJP-led government was waiting for the U.N. Security Council to adopt a resolution which would give the US occupation some form of legitimacy. This would pave the way for the Government to claim that sending troops has UN sanction. But the resolution adopted by the Council on May 22, does not lend itself to any interpretation that a UN peacekeeping force will be put in place. The resolution recognizes the US and Britain as the occupying authorities. Iraq will be under the control of the US armed forces not a United Nations force. There is no mandate for a UN peacekeeping force. Further, the UN has accorded this role to the US-British forces for a period of twelve months, after which the matter will be taken up for consideration again in the Council.

The UN Special Representative for Iraq has an advisory role, real authority vests with the American administrator.

If India sends troops it will be part of a multinational force under US command. The Chief of the US Central Command will be in overall command of such a force.

What are the implications of such an Indian force in Iraq? It is well known that after the ouster of the Saddam Hussein government and the military occupation, Iraq is in a state of chaos and lawlessness. The Americans had not anticipated such a situation. There has been widespread looting and destruction going on for weeks. Attacks on US soldiers and American troops firing on civilians have become a common feature. In Fallujah town alone, in the space of two days, in two incidents of firing, fifteen people were shot dead by US soldiers.

The mess that has been created by the military occupation has upset the plans of the Bush Administration. It had announced in April that Iraqi groups would be allowed to form a national assembly and an interim government by the end of May. In an abrupt about turn, the new American administrator Paul Bremer informed the Iraqi clients that the interim administration headed by the Americans would continue for an indefinite period. This is an admission of failure. No viable "Iraqi" administration is possible with the bunch of Iraqi leaders who have returned from exile and no cohesive team has emerged from the motley crowd gathered by the Americans. With basic facilities like electricity and water not restored, there is no semblance yet of an administration working.

It is at such a juncture, with the administration very much in the hands of the Americans, that Indian troops, if sent, will be expected to perform the job of a "policing force".

Now that the military invasion and occupation has been accomplished, the Americans want others to share the burden of pacification of the recalcitrant population. The toll taken of lives of American soldiers in the form of sniper attacks and ambushes

have to be curtailed. Help is sought from countries such as India, Pakistan and Philippines and from its new found East European friends such as Poland and Hungary. The fact that India has figured in the list is itself indicative of the new status that the Vajpayee government has subordinated the country to. Sending a contingent under the present circumstances would mean Indian soldiers will have to put down protests against the American occupation. The suppression of the Iraqi people who are increasingly hostile to the occupation, will be part of the job. Not only that, the US has drawn up plans to use Iraq's oil wealth for "reconstruction" work the profits of which will be pocketed by the American corporations. The UN resolution calls for phasing out the food-for-oil programme within six months and the lifting of sanctions. This will facilitate the US use of the Iraqi oil revenues. Already a former Shell executive has been appointed advisor to the Iraqi petroleum ministry.

The Indian troops will have to be paid for their sojourn in Iraq. This will not be done out of UN funds. If the payment is made by the Americans, our soldiers would act as a paid mercenary force for the Americans. This is something totally unacceptable to most Indians. That the government can even contemplate such a mission reveals how far down the road the BJP has traveled in its eagerness to win US approbation. For the past five years, the Vajpayee government has steadily entangled India in a strategic relationship with the US which is unequal and to the advantage of the Americans.

In a recent article, the outgoing US ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, boasted about the great strides in Indo-US military ties. Writing in *The Hindu* (dated May 13, 2003), he expresses satisfaction at the all-round progress in military cooperation. US special operation forces, the same which has been in use in Afghanistan and Iraq, recently were in the Jungle Training School of the Indian army in Mizoram for joint exercises with Indian forces. More joint exercises of the naval forces are in the offing. Since October, 2002, India can import US arms equipment upto

value of $14 million per item without Congressional notification. This according to Blackwill puts India in the "same category with American Treaty Allies such as South Korea and Japan". More significantly, the Indian Army will host the 2004 Pacific Armies Management Seminar, an annual meeting of senior army leadership of the Pacific region. The Indian armed forces seem to be categorised with the Philippine and Indonesian armed forces, traditional allies of the Pentagon. India is being integrated into the global military strategy of the US with the blessings of Vajpayee and George Fernandes. It is this nexus which requires sending troops at the service of the US occupation in Iraq.

The BJP-led government has taken to this path under a great illusion. While the Pacific command of the US armed forces deals with India, the Central Command deals with Pakistan. The website of this Command recently gave out details of how closely Pakistan collaborated in the military operations in Afghanistan. In 2002, the US provided a special $73 million package for "improving security" along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Under the Foreign Military Financing Grant of the US government, Pakistan will get $200 million in 2003-04.

The deep appreciation that the US has for Pakistan's regime is evident in the invitation that Musharaff has received to meet Bush at Camp David. This must surely discomfit our BJP leaders who are thrilled if Bush "drops in" to see them while they are meeting some junior functionary, or if given 15 minutes in the Oval office. It is this subservient mind-set which clouds the judgement of the ruling circles. For the US, Pakistan and India are together part of its strategic designs in the region. If Pakistan is useful as a Muslim country and a neighbour of Afghanistan and the Middle East, India with its BJP-led government is a useful counterweight which can be used for the purposes of acting against any interests hostile to the US from the same region. The Vajpayee regime's chorus of praise for Israel and its lining up with the arch-enemy of the Arab peoples is a reassurance for the US that India can be relied upon to play a role which Pakistan cannot. This is

the meaning of Brajesh Mishra's appearance at the American Jewish Committee's annual dinner and his speech calling for India, US and Israel joining hands to fight terrorism. The AJC is well-known for its blind support to the Sharon regime's aggressive policies.

To come back to the question of Indian troops in Iraq. The BJP-led government has no right to take this decision without the concurrence of Parliament. In the last session, Parliament had adopted a resolution opposing the US-British war on Iraq and called for the withdrawal of its forces. To send troops to serve under these occupying authorities, is to flagrantly violate the Parliament decision which reflects the views of the Indian people.

The existence of a colonial occupation in Iraq is an affront to the independence and sovereignty of all countries. The British acquired Iraq during the First World War when it fought the Ottoman empire to which belonged the territories which are modern-day Iraq. The occupation of Basra, Baghdad and the Mosul provinces were accomplished by the British Indian army. Ninety thousand troops of the colonial army belonging to India, took more than two years to secure Iraq. Thousands of Indian soldiers died in the fighting. Today, Iraq has been occupied once again by the imperialist powers. In an eerie repetition of history, we are asked to provide soldiers for recolonising Iraq. But this is not 1914, when India was a colony. Despite the machinations of the Vajpayee regime, the Indian people will not allow a repeat of colonial history.

(*People's Democracy*, May 26-June 01, 2003)

No Indian Troops for Recolonisation

The Prime Minister is expected to take a decision on whether or not to send Indian troops to Iraq as requested by the U.S. administration. The NDA meeting authorized him to take the decision, presumably after his return from China. All reports show that the Government is keen to send a contingent of the Indian army to American-occupied Iraq. This is so, despite the objection of all the opposition political parties and a unanimous resolution of Parliament calling for the withdrawal of the American and British troops from Iraq.

The BJP-led government is trying to prepare the ground for sending troops in a clandestine fashion. Finding it difficult to justify such a decision, once the matter became public, the Government is now engaged in finding a pretext to commit troops to Iraq. The issue raises disturbing questions about the sincerity of the Government. The Vajpayee government has been secretly negotiating with the Bush administration and misleading the people. Their evasive maneouvres have involved outright lies to camouflage what appears to be a commitment made to the Americans much before the matter became public.

A careful analysis of the events, reveals that the Bush administration made its first approach as early as the first week of May. Formally, the matter was taken up when Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, visited India and met all the top Government leaders including the Prime Minister. In fact, this was one of the main issues on the agenda for talks, not just Indo-Pakistan relations. Yet, both the Indian and American sides denied

that Americans made any requests to send Indian troops to Iraq. Armitage, at his press conference on May 10, stated that he had made "no specific request" to deploy Indian troops in Iraq "or anything of that nature". The Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, on the same day, issued a similar denial that India received any formal request. This denial was in response to a *NDTV* news report that a division of Rashtriya Rifles was being readied to be sent to Iraq. *The Indian Express* followed this up the next day with a report that two US embassy officials, the Deputy Chief of Mission and the Military Attache, met Indian Army authorities on May 6 to discuss the "stabilization force" proposal. Yet the Indian Army denied reports that a division of troops was being prepared for Iraq and reiterated that "no specific request" had been made.

What the Vajpayee government went to great lengths to conceal, was that the US soon after it had made plans for inducting a "stabilisation force" had asked India to join this venture. On April 30, there was a meeting of 16 countries in London attended by the British Defence Minister, Geoffrey Hoon, to discuss the creation of a stabilization force for Iraq. India did not attend this meeting. In this meeting it became clear that the staunch allies of the US were not willing or able to commit troops to the level required by the United States. Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence Secretary, visited London and at a joint press conference with Hoon stated: "The larger the number of countries that participate, the fewer the number of forces from the United States will be necessary." The Americans want to pull out their troops quickly and replace them with the troops of what they call the "coalition of the willing".

There was a second meeting of a working group on the stabilization force in London on May 8. By that time, the Bush Administration had approached India to send troops. The demand for a division stemmed from its failure to get no more than fifteen thousand troops from all its NATO and close allies. The staunchest allies of the US, like Italy and Spain, who from the outset supported the US war, committed only 3000 and 2300 troops

respectively. Poland which has been given the dubious honour of commanding a zone is also contributing only 2300 soldiers. This failure to muster adequate numbers from its traditional NATO allies led the US to ask India to send a division.

The demand that India send a contingent of troops amounting to 17,000 soldiers is astounding. This would mean that India would have the second largest force in the occupation after the Americans. The British who joined in the invasion of Iraq does not have more than 12,000 troops. The reason why India is being asked to send such a large contingent is because of the failure of the US to convince other countries to send adequate forces. The United States wants to reduce its current troop strength in Iraq which is 146,000 to 30-40,000 within the next two to three months. Testifying before the House Armed Services Committee of the US Congress, the Pentagon authorities have said they have been able to raise 20,000 additional troops from various countries. General Pace, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff said that discussions were underway with another unidentified country to provide atleast 10,000 troops. This is presumably India. Since NATO countries and all other allies of the US are contributing not more than 20,000 troops, it becomes important for the US to get India to send a large force. The United States has approached even countries like Bangladesh and Fiji to send troops.

What the Indian government tried to conceal from its own people, was known to international circles. As early as May 5, the Polish Deputy Defence Minister had announced that Asian countries like India, Pakistan and Philippines could take part, according to an *AFP/PTI* report.

Only later did the Indian side acknowledge the American request for troops. Brajesh Mishra, the National Security Adviser, on his return from Washington admitted as much and said, "India did not relent on its insistence that its participation would be possible only under a UN arrangement". But faced with relentless pressure, witnessed during the Advani visit to Washington, the Indian government continues to search for some pretext to send

troops into Iraq when it is absolutely clear that there will be nothing but a US occupation, that too a military occupation.

We are told that India will operate in its own independent zone under its own flag; that India would be represented in the "joint task force" to run the command and control structure of the stabilisation force. But the reality cannot be obscured. The US Central Command is in overall command of the occupation force. India's status will be like Poland's in Iraq. The US has assigned a zone to the Polish forces. Under the Polish General, Andrzej Tysckiewicz, troops from Hungary, Bulgaria, Spain and Ukraine will serve. The Vajpayee government would have us believe that an Indian general commanding a zone, like Poland, fufills the requirement of doing away with a United Nations mandated peacekeeping force. Moreover, there is no peacekeeping work in Iraq. There is the US and Britain in occupation of a sovereign country though an illegal war of aggression. The United Nations Security Council, by its resolution has recognized them as the "occupying authority". But the Iraqi people do not accept this colonial status.

The quest for getting other countries to send troops to enforce its occupation of Iraq is getting more urgent and desperate. Everyday the opposition to the American occupiers is mounting. There are daily attacks on US soldiers. Since May 1, when the US officially declared the war to be over, an American soldier has died everyday in Iraq. The deaths crossed 60 on June 28. Guerilla attacks and hit-and-run raids harass the US troops. The response has been the use of brutal military force. "Operation Desert Scorpion" has been followed by "Operation Sidewinder". American tanks, helicopters and troops have fanned out in the central and northern areas outside Baghdad to hunt down what they call "remnants of the old regime" or "terrorists". Thousands have been rounded up and put in detention; house to house searches and ill-treatment of civilians are causing outrage among the people. Yet the intensity of the attacks are increasing. In one single incident in the south, six British military policemen were attacked and killed. The Iraqi

people with their proud tradition of fighting colonialism are valiantly resisting the new colonizers.

The popular opposition to the occupation has grown steadily. The Americans are faced with the unpleasant task of running the regime without having even a token civilian administration. Plans for an interim administration have been put off. The highest Shia religious authority, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, has issued a fatwa forbidding anyone from participating in America's hand-picked consultative body. Meanwhile plans to hold a local election in An Najaf town were cancelled at the last moment by the head of the US occupation, Paul Bremer, when it became evident, that anti-American forces would win the vote.

Faced with mounting opposition, the BJP-led government adopted a new tack — to ascertain "the wishes of the Iraqi people" on whether to send troops. This is a pathetic justification. Iraq is under direct military occupation of the United States for the past three months. The Americans have no intention of handing over the country to the Iraqis or any democratic set-up. What the Americans wish to do is to put up an Iraqi "face" to the administration. Even that has not materialized. The "Governor" of Iraq, Paul Bremer, has said "In a post-war situation like this, if you start holding elections, the people who are rejectionist tend to win. It is often the best organised who win, and the best organised right now are the former Baathists and to some extent the Islamists." So all towns and cities are having nominated mayors and the US command has ordered all elections to be cancelled.

So the charade of finding out the wishes of the Iraqi people would mean asking the stooges of the Americans whether Indian troops should be deployed to protect them from the wrath of their own people!

In an interview to *The Hindu* on June 20, the outgoing US Ambassador Robert Blackwill said that India can play a major role in Iraq and be on the "inner board of directors" managing the security of Iraq. What this means is that the Americans would

provide India some representation in its occupation regime at the military level. Since Britain, Poland and India, apart from the Americans are expected to look after different sectors, the Indian General in command would be represented in the command and control structure. But there can be no doubt that the ultimate command will lie with the Americans.

Blackwill also clarified that the United States expects India to pay for its troops in Iraq. The stationing of a full division and its upkeep to serve the American occupation will have to be paid for by the Indian people. The Vajpayee government does not seem to have any problem with this. It may prefer to be paid by the Americans, but the mercenary aspect of such an arrangement would be only too obvious.

If a decision to send troops is taken, it will be a decisive moment. It will signify another major step in the Vajpayee government's continuing quest to become a subordinate ally of the United States. The participation of Indian troops in the subjugation and recolonisation of Iraq will spell the end of any semblance of an independent foreign policy.

The BJP-led government wants to be on the side of the Americans and is willing to dispatch troops to enforce the colonial occupation. Unlike the ruling circles, a wide spectrum of public opinion and the entire opposition see things differently. Their support and solidarity will be with the Iraqi people who are opposing and fighting the occupation. There can be no national consensus for acting as agents for an imperial power and betraying both the Iraqi people and our own national traditions.

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